# MAN Infestation

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# MAN Infestation

by 305unreal

Summary

The children of a hidden European village band together against a government agency known as MAN.

The morning sun shines down gently through the thick boughs of the forest as Will, Bev, and Alana play in their meadow, collecting colorful wildflowers.

"Look at this blue one, isn't it just lovely?" coos Alana, holding up a velvety bloom.

Bev grins mischievously. "I bet I could juggle five of them!" she declares, snatching up an armful.

Will laughs at his silly friends but something else soon catches his eye in the distance. A strange man in a long black coat walks along the edge of the trees. Intrigued but sensing something is amiss, Will creeps closer through the tall grass to get a better look at the mysterious man.

Alana notices Will wandering off and calls out, "Where are you going, Willie? Come back!"

But her voice is drowned out by a sudden rustling in the brush. A large hare bursts through, fleeing in terror. At that moment, the man whirls around, his eyes locking with Will's. Bev gasps. "It's one of them! Run!"

The man bellows as he gives chase, crashing after the children as they scramble back toward the village. Will's mother Mary is hanging laundry when she hears the commotion.

"Mama help!" yelps Will, crashing into her skirt in tears.

She scoops him up instantly, fear chilling her to the bone at the sight of the MAN agent storming towards them. "Get to the tunnels, now!" she orders the others.

Bev takes Alana's hand and they flee with Will into the dense forest, branches clawing at their clothes. Will looks back to see his mama wrestling with the large man, giving them time to escape.

"Hurry, to Hannibal's house!" Bev orders, knowing it leads to a hidden pathway.

They burst through the door, startling Hannibal and his mother Simonetta. "They're coming, we must hide away beneath the earth," Simonetta speaks gravely. And with that, she opens the trapdoor and they disappear into the deep underground. The children tumble down the wooden ladder into the musty tunnel, Bev helping Alana find her footing.

"This way," Hannibal speaks grimly, taking the lead with an old kerosene lantern. Behind them, Simonetta pulls the trapdoor closed just as angry shouts sound above.

"What's going to happen to my mama?" cries Will, tugging at Bev's dress in panic.

Hannibal scoops him up consolingly. "Shh, she'll find us down here. Your mama's the strongest."

Doubt gnaws at Hannibal's own words as they hurry through the earthen passage. Ahead, the tunnel opens into a large underground village carved from the earth, lit with oil lamps. The secret community of outlaws looks up in alarm at the children's arrival.

"They've found us," announces Hannibal gravely to the chief.

A collective gasp rises as an elder man with a beard emerges from a hut. "Barricade the tunnel entrance. We'll hold a council to discuss our new course."

The villagers scramble into action to fortify their refuge. Only time will tell if the MAN agents' pursuit will breach even this depth. Outside, in the thick woods, Mary and Bev's father Robert hurry to obstruct the path that leads to the hidden village. They work furiously, rolling fallen logs and using brush to camouflage the trail. Molly's heart is heavy as she works. Her son is safe below, but what of her fate if caught? She tries not to dwell on such dark thoughts. Nearby, Robert rigs traps should the agents give chase on foot. Just then, an ominous crack of branches sounds too close. Through the trees appear two black-coated men, guns drawn.

"Halt! You are fugitives of MAN," shouts one.

Mary steels her nerves. "We've done nothing wrong. Leave us be," she replies firmly.

But the agents advance nonetheless. Robert flings an axe, distracting them long enough for Mary to grab a fallen branch. She swings with all her might, adrenaline and mother's rage fueling her strike. There's a sickening crunch and one man goes down. Yet more are coming, alerts now raised of rebels in the woods. Robert fires his rifle, falling another.

"We must flee, there's too many," he cries.

Reluctantly Mary agrees, but not before setting fire to the brush as a diversion and smokescreen. As they run through the fiery woods, fleeing deeper into the forest and darkness, Mary prays her son will remain hidden long until this terror passes. Their village is barricaded, but for how long?

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Several months come and go with no sighting of black coats in the forest. Winter falls with its usual quiet snow, and the village settles into its slumber beneath the earth. One bright cold day, Will and Bev play in snowdrifts near the hidden entrance, pelting each other with fluffy balls. Alana and Hannibal join the elders, bundling up to collect firewood from fallen branches on the forest floor. Mary emerges from the tunnels, bundled warmly in fur.

"Will, Bev, come help Mama find mushrooms and berries," she beckons the children.

Eager to help, they follow her up the ladder into the hushed woods. The forest is dusted in white, trees like frozen sentinels overlooking the scene. Mary shows the kids which bushes harbor bright berries despite the frost. Will spots colorful mushrooms peeking from a mossy hollow.

"Good eye son. Gather what you can find."

As they work, Will senses eyes upon them and glances up sharply. Through bare trees stride two black-coated silhouettes. Mary freezes, panic coursing through her. Were they back after so long? She gathers the children close.

"Run home, now. Tell them danger comes." Heart in her throat, Mary watches them flee before emerging from cover. "Leave us in peace!" she shouts, but the sinister Men only smirk and raise their rifles in response.

The chase is on once more. Will's anguished cry is muffled by Bev's hand as another gunshot echoes behind them. Mary's scream cuts off abruptly, plunging the forest into a heavy silence. Tears stream down Will's face as Bev holds him close in the darkness of the rocky cave.

"Shh, we mustn't let them find us," she whispers, her heart breaking for her friend's loss.

Will shudders in her arms, his small body wracked with sorrow. Bev has never felt so afraid —or protective. She needs to get Will to safety and avenge Mary. But venturing out means risking the agents' guns. As night falls, the forest grows restless, as if mourning Mary too. A lone owl's hoot sounds nearby, making the children cling closer together for warmth and comfort. Bev prays her father and the others will seek refuge come dawn, to lead Will back below where he belongs. She listens extremely carefully for any shifting of branches, boots crackling the snow, alert to the predators that now prowl these woods. Until help comes, it was up to her to keep Will from the bullets' cruel fate. He drifts into an exhausted sleep as she holds a silent vigil through the long dark hours.

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